



Natural Heritage &
Endangered Species
Program

Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Division of Fisheries & Wildlife
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MASSACHUSETTS THREATENED PLANTS

GIANT ST. JOHN'S-WORT

(*Hypericum ascyron* L.)

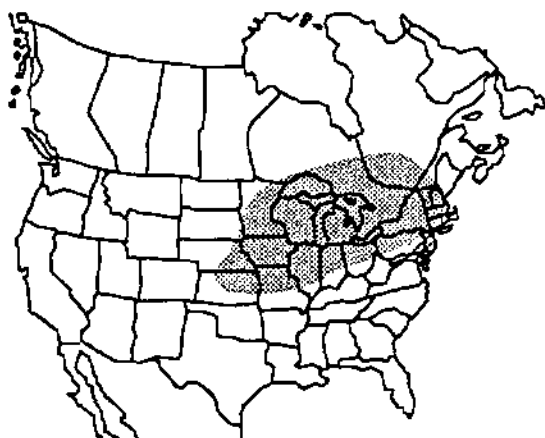
(*H. pyramidatum* Aiton)

Description

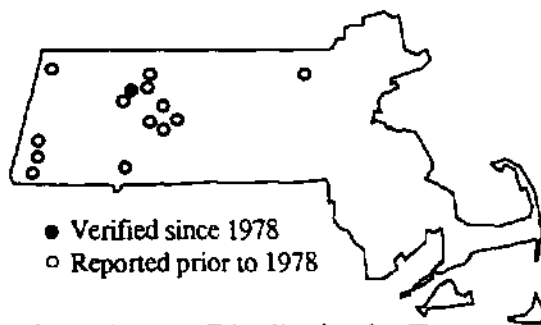
Giant St. John's-wort, a member of the St. John's-wort family (Clusiaceae) is an erect, herbaceous perennial with large, showy, yellow flowers. The plant can be quite tall--ranging from 60 to 180 cm (2-6 ft.). In Massachusetts, it is generally from 2 to 4 feet tall, however. Giant St. John's-wort's 2.5-13 cm (1 - 5 in.) long leaves are opposite, stalkless, lanceolate, smooth-margined and cordate (or heart-shaped at the base). The flowers have five petals, numerous stamens, five sepals, and a rather distinctive pistil (female reproductive structure): At its top, this compound, five-chambered pistil has five spreading styles (the upper, stalk-like structures of the pistil). Older petals of Giant St. John's-wort roll up lengthwise. *H. ascyron* flowers from early July to early August and fruits from early September to early October.



Gleason, H.A. The New Britton and Brown Illustrated Flora of the US & Adjacent Canada. NY Botanical Garden, 1952.



Documented Range of Giant
St. John's-wort



Massachusetts Distribution by Town

(*H. ascyron*'s former name of *H. pyramidatum* may be used if one believes North American plants are different from those of Eurasia.)

Similar Species

H. ascyron could be confused with Common St. John's-wort (*H. perforatum*). However, the latter is, generally, much shorter (no higher than two feet) and has spots along the margins of its petals. Furthermore, its flowers are smaller than those of Giant St. John's-wort: Common St. John's-wort has flowers that are about 1 in. across, compared to Giant St. John's-wort's 2 in. wide flowers. Pale St. John's-wort (*H. ellipticum*), like Giant St. John's-wort, has unmarked, yellow petals. Nevertheless, both its flowers and its leaves are much smaller, and it grows to only 20 in. in height.

Habitat in Massachusetts

In general, Giant St. John's-wort prefers wet meadows and moist thickets near streams or rivers. Habitats of Giant St. John's-wort in Massachusetts include a sumac stand underneath electric transmission lines and a dry river channel, with cobble and silty sand substrate, that is subject to scouring during annual flooding. Species associated with *H. ascyron* include Red Maple (*Acer rubrum*), Speckled Alder (*Alnus rugosa*), Hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*), Yellow Birch (*Betula alleghaniensis*) and various willows (*Salix* spp.).

Population Status

Giant St. John's-wort is presently listed as "Threatened" in Massachusetts, where there are two current stations (discovered or relocated since 1978) in one town and fourteen historical stations (unverified since 1978). (One historical station is known only to the county and does not appear on the town distribution map.) The plant is also considered rare in Connecticut, Indiana, Kentucky, Missouri, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Jersey, West Virginia and Vermont. Giant St. John's-wort was present historically in Kansas, Maryland, and Maine.